

# CAPTURING *Beauty*



*Rosa foetida bicolor*, hand-colored etching, from Mary Lawrence's *A Collection of Roses*, 1799; courtesy of the New York Public Library.



*Rosa foetida bicolor*, stipple engraving by Pierre Joseph Redouté from Claude-Antoine Thory's *Les roses decrites et classes selon leur ordre naturel* (published 1817-1824)

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For the editors, one of the joys of producing *Rosa Mundi* is our exposure to the many wonderful images of roses, both contemporary and historic. For the journal's covers, our preference from the start was to publish rose portraits by botanical artists, especially rare images that would embody the theme of each issue as well as our mission.

Selecting the cover may be fun but coming to agreement is not always easy. Take this issue. We settled on *Rosa foetida bicolor* quickly enough. A sport from *R. foetida*, known since before 1590, the Austrian Copper bequeathed its fiery orange and scarlet to modern roses. In *Shrub Roses of Today* Graham Stuart Thomas called it "such a glorious personage itself that . . . it can be the focal point for the whole garden for its few brief weeks of flowering." Although said to be as unpleasantly scented as its name suggests, the rose more than compensates with the brilliance of its petals. As Thomas put it, "Such a furnace of colour is overpowering except in occasional blasts." The rose is erect, growing to 5 or 6 feet, and has straight or almost straight prickles; small leaves; vertical sepals; round hips that are orange, red, or maroon; bright green foliage; and chestnut brown wood.

We had four fantastic images at hand: two stipple engravings by Pierre Joseph Redouté, perhaps the best known of all rose painters; a hand-colored etching by the late 18th century English artist Mary Lawrance, and a contemporary photograph by Saxon Holt, life-long gardener and well-known commercial photographer. Which interpreter of the rose would we choose?

In considering the two Redoutés, we weighed the fact that while Redouté's work is quite well known, the Duhamel Redouté is extremely rare. I was also drawn to its drama and intensity. Gregg thought the Redouté from *Les Roses* a bit less lively. Saxon Holt's photograph, very much in the style of Redouté, reflects an intense appreciation for the physical attributes of the rose. In the end we chose the portrait by Mary Lawrance, despite the fact that Sir Sacheverell Sitwell in his *Great Flower Books* wrote that "Mary Lawrance's *Roses* (1799) is the work of a quite second-rate botanical artist . . . yet its plates, cunningly framed, look delightful on a wall."

Mary Lawrance was a popular artist, botanical drawing teacher, and exhibitor at England's Royal Academy from 1794 to 1830. Her version does not represent the rose as realistically in all particulars as Redouté's and Saxon Holt's, but her charming rendering of its personality is so appealing and animated. Lest you think that charm and reasonable botanical accuracy were our primary considerations, let me assure you that such issues as budget, copyright, print quality, and clarity of the original source also got factored in. But charm won the day.



*Rosa foetida bicolor*, stipple engraving by Pierre Joseph Redouté from Duhamel du Monceau's *Traité des arbres et arbustes que l'on cultive en pleine terre en Europe* (published 1801-1819); courtesy of the New York Public Library.



Photo by Saxon Holt